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THE GREEK RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

THE history of culture in Italian cities of the fifteenth century has long been considered a fascinating record of vivid, brilliant personalities who displayed a delightful enthusiasm for pictures, statues and cathedrals, antique coins, strange manuscripts and Ciceronian rhetoric. The causes of the rapid development of artistic and historical feeling that gave the period its peculiar character have never been altogether determined. But writers of reputation have occasionally ventured the opinion that the revival of the study of the classical literatures, in particular of the Greek language and the Greek writers, which marked the opening of the century, supplied the needed stimulus to the Italian intellect and set it free forever from the bondage of medieval ignorance and superstition; in short, that out of the revival of Greek grew the Italian Renaissance. The revival itself, they tell us, was due largely to the influence of Petrarch, "the first modern man". He it was who scorned scholasticism, and found his comfort in the Latin classics and set his contemporaries and successors to inquiring how a knowledge of the Greek tongue could be regained. It is the purpose of this paper to present a few considerations bearing upon this theory and to inquire whether the much-vaunted recovery of Greek in the fifteenth century had in fact the significance and value which are currently ascribed to it.

In the beginning one may be saved from the danger of regarding the fifteenth-century movement as unprecedented and unique by a hasty preliminary glance at the work accomplished in a similar direction by the schoolmen of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. During those centuries, it is enough to remember, Latin translations of Euclid, Ptolemy, two or three dialogues of Plato and almost the whole of Aristotle were introduced into western Europe and widely and seriously studied. The effect of the influx of new learning was to enrich and broaden immediately the scientific and philosophical courses of the schools and to quicken and educate thought along many lines. Both Plato and Aristotle soon had disciples who applied the methods of reasoning and the knowledge gained from their works to discussions of religion and dogma.

Roger Bacon composed a Greek grammar on a comprehensive plan to enable Latins to undertake the study of Greek authors in the original and to read books which had not yet been translated.

In the end further progress was checked by the forces of conservatism and reaction. The dialogues of Plato were not included among prescribed university text-books and became again less known and less influential. The works of Aristotle were re-edited and re-interpreted by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas in such a form as to furnish a solid, scientific foundation for a vast system of Catholic theology. Heretical free-thinking was suppressed at certain critical junctures by the church courts and counteracted in general by the able and orthodox teaching of the Mendicant friars. The policy of Roger Bacon's superiors kept him unknown and unheard during his lifetime and at his death his grammar as a potential factor in the situation perished with him. The process of translating from the Greek stopped. The leadership both in original thought and in the revival of classical learning passed for the time being from France to Italy. But a large and important portion of Greek philosophy and science had actually been appropriated by the thirteenth century and the way had thereby been made easier for the recovery of more in the fifteenth.

For various reasons north Italy toward the end of the fourteenth century seemed peculiarly adapted to become the seat of another classical renaissance, though of one somewhat different in character and results from that which had already run its course. For some time past Tuscan architects, sculptors and painters had been winning a name for excellence and had been taking models not only from Gothic workmanship of the North but also from ancient monuments preserved above ground in the cities of the peninsula. John of Pisa, for example, had introduced a copy of a Roman Venus among the figures about the foot of the pulpit of the Pisan cathedral. Giotto had borrowed designs of ornamentation from the columns of Trajan. Notice was being attracted to the remnants of antique art that were not buried in stone walls or under dust and mire or so disfigured and broken as to be unrecognizable.

On the other hand Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and their followers were arousing in their countrymen a sense of the beauty and refinement that might be found in literature and were reminding them again of the existence of venerable treasures that had long been neglected by the western world. Outwardly the church still kept its undisputed prestige but in Italy at least it ruled with a lax and lenient hand. Academic radicalism or even downright

paganism of thought need fear now no serious interference and might actually receive encouragement from tolerant ecclesiastical patrons of letters. Finally the Italian merchant, having attained to a state of political independence and great social prosperity, possessed the leisure and the wealth to encourage scholarship and was in an unusually patriotic and ambitious mood. Both patriotism and ambition disposed him to find pleasure in recalling memories of the ancient past. A special heritage of glory descended, as he felt, directly upon himself from those mighty Romans whom he loved to call his ancestors.

The student of the thirteenth century had felt profound reverence for the wisdom of the ancients but Petrarch was perhaps in fact the first man of eminence to call attention to certain esthetic and moral differences in style and point of view between them and medieval writers. He discerned in the classics a latitude of opinion and a broad, philosophic code of ethics together with a grace of expression and euphony of diction that seemed wanting in his contemporaries. Observing that his favorite authors, Cicero and Vergil, alluded continually to Greek works unattainable to him as the sources of their inspiration, he attempted to learn Greek from a Byzantine envoy at Avignon but failed to master much beyond the alphabet. Nevertheless he succeeded in turning the thoughts of his literary successors in Italy toward the subjects which had possessed so powerful an attraction for him and in setting up certain new standards of literary excellence that were to prevail for generations afterward.

Two months after Petrarch's death Coluccio Salutato, a rising young Florentine, composed a letter of eulogy upon his learning and employed therein a phrase which was shortly to become famous. Speaking of Petrarch's zeal for Greek and Latin letters Salutato called them, "*studia humanitatis*". In a letter written some time later he took occasion to explain the phrase, stating that he had found the word *humanitas* used by Cicero and other Romans to denote at the same time affability and courtesy of disposition and culture and refinement of mind, that is, the qualities which especially distinguish man from brute.¹ By the opening of the fifteenth century the term was in common circulation, applied to the study of antiquity from the esthetic or literary point of view as differentiated from the study of law, theology or any other technical or professional subject. The "*studia humanitatis*", it was declared, taught one by both precept and example the most important lessons,

¹ Salutato, *Epistolae* (ed. Novati), vol. I., p. 179; vol. III., pp. 534-536.

how to be high-minded and to be eloquent, how to lead an admirable life guided by motives of patriotism and honor, and how to express oneself with harmony, persuasiveness and elegance, avoiding alike clownishness of demeanor and barbarisms of language, proving oneself in every act and sentence the enlightened and fastidious gentleman and scholar.² Such an ideal of deportment was essentially aristocratic and artificial but it appealed to the growing appreciation of the value of form and decorum in human undertakings.

An illustration of a purely humanistic mode of judgment is furnished by the well-known letter of Poggio Bracciolini on the trial and execution of Jerome of Prague. The ecclesiastical arguments Poggio refuses to rehearse nor on the other hand does he allude to the practical problems suggested by the reformer's fate. Instead he devotes pages to applauding the sonorousness of Jerome's speech, the effectiveness of his gestures and the learning with which he quoted the classics and the fathers. He deplores the loss of such an ornament to the literary profession. "I admit", he remarks, "that I have never seen any one plead a case, in particular a case involving life and death, with an eloquence so like that of the ancients whom we all so deeply admire. It was marvelous to behold the fluency, the grace, the persuasiveness, the dignity of mien, the clearness of voice and the courage with which he replied to his adversaries and argued his cause to the last. One must regret that so noble and lofty a mind was beguiled into heresy, if indeed the accusations brought against him are well grounded. For I am no judge in such matters; I acquiesce in the decisions of those who are wiser than I. . . . He spoke like an orator, yet he was composed. He showed indignation and stirred the onlookers to pity, yet he neither aimed nor desired to take advantage of their emotion. He stood cool, fearless, not only despising death but even seeking it. You would have pronounced him a second Cato."³

The passage tempts one to contrast for an instant the spirit of the fifteenth-century humanist with that of the thirteenth-century student of Aristotle. The latter would undoubtedly have been im-

² For an eloquent exposition of this theory, see Leonardo Bruni's letter to a young friend who was hesitating between "studia humanitatis" and civil law, *Epistolae* (ed. Mehus), vol. II., pp. 49-51.

³ Poggio, *Epistolae* (ed. de Tonellis), vol. I., pp. 11-19. An English rendering of the letter is in Whitcomb's *Source-Book of the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 40-47. Compare with this Vittorino da Feltre's defence of the reliability of the historian Livy on the ground that a sound Latinist, an elegant narrator and a Paduan could not possibly be untrustworthy. Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre*, p. 218.

pressed also by Jerome's erudition and spirited demeanor, but would have been still more concerned to follow the logical intricacies of the debate. The former is indifferent to logic; he hardly reasons at all; he ignores for the most part all elements in the situation but those of sentiment and taste.

It has seemed worth while to dwell at some length upon the peculiar standpoint of the humanist and his conception of the quality and aim of his pursuits, because without some understanding of his feeling on these matters it is impossible to comprehend the nature of the Greek Renaissance. It is only necessary to add that the generation which followed after Petrarch spoke like him somewhat slightly of the training afforded by scholastic philosophy and, above all else, revered and imitated the manner and style of Cicero. Like Petrarch also they desired to make further acquaintance with the Greeks whom Cicero acknowledged as his superiors. If Cicero were eloquent and uplifting, Demosthenes and Plato must be more eloquent and uplifting. The most promising pupil of Petrarch left his master twice to travel through Italy on a vain quest for some one to teach him Greek.

The events which actually ushered in the Greek Renaissance are related now in most histories and may be passed over rapidly here. In 1395 Manuel Chrysoloras, a Byzantine of family and influence and scholarly reputation, who had made himself pleasantly known during a short residence as imperial envoy in Venice, was invited to teach Greek in the University of Florence. For twenty years thereafter he spent at intervals considerable time in Italy, whether as teacher of Greek in Florence or Pavia or as representative from Constantinople at the papal court. He was apparently possessed of a fund of genuine learning in his own literature, an enthusiasm for imparting knowledge and an urbanity of manner and kindness of disposition that fitted him well to be the apostle of a forgotten culture. The most successful Hellenists of the first quarter of the fifteenth century were his pupils. There seems to have been something even impressive about his personality. Amid all the caustic and supercilious criticism that fills the literary correspondence of those years his is almost the only name that is invariably mentioned without a derogatory remark, with only respect and affection.⁴

Chrysoloras was followed to Italy by others of his countrymen whose numbers increased especially during the twenty years between

⁴For some of the many warm allusions to Chrysoloras, see Traversari, *Epistolae* (ed. Mehus), vol. I., p. cccxiii; P. P. Vergerio, *Epistolae* (ed. Luciani), pp. 218-219; Poggio, *Epistolae*, vol. I., pp. 23-24.

the meeting of the Council of Ferrara-Florence and the completion of the Mohammedan conquest of the Eastern Empire. They hoped of course to find comfortable employment, as he had done, as teachers or copyists or translators of Greek works into Latin. Some few were in fact liberally treated and in time were able to exert considerable influence in Italian circles. Bessarion was elevated to the cardinalate and even discussed as a candidate for election to the papacy. Gemisthus Pletho was entertained as guest at the court of the Medici. The great majority of the refugees, however, losing distinction in western eyes as they became more numerous, dependent upon western bounty for shelter and livelihood, were soon regarded with indifference or active contempt. Their peculiarities of dress were treated as material for diversion by the wits. "I never look at one of those men without laughing", writes a young Italian at the Council of Ferrara who himself was making translations from Lucian, Plutarch and Xenophon. "For some of them I see with beards streaming over their chests, hair thick, rough and unkempt, as we read the Spartans wore theirs under the laws of Lycurgus that they might be more formidable when they met the enemy; others have beards partly trimmed and heads half shaved and painted eyebrows. Some wear caps of various kinds, some turbans with birds' feathers or a gold fastening on top and long sleeved tunics. As the poet says of the Phrygians, 'and their tunics have sleeves and their turbans adornments'. . . . The greater number are so absurd that no one is solemn or morose enough to restrain his mirth when he sees them."⁵

On the other hand the Greeks, proud and irascible in their poverty and exile, were slow to learn a new language or to adapt themselves to new ways and often possessed neither the knowledge of their own literature nor the flexibility of mind to make themselves valuable to western employers. Italians who had learned Greek at home or had studied it, as Guarino and Filelfo did, in the East, were in many cases preferred both as teachers and translators to the Greeks themselves who were considered arrogant and unreliable in temper and who spoke and wrote such halting and imperfect Latin that they could with difficulty be understood. Even men of in-

⁵ Lapi Castelliunculi, *De Curiae Commodis*, extract in Hodus, *De Graecis Illustribus*, p. 31. Compare Bruni, *Epistolae*, vol. I., p. 91. About this time Traversari was writing anxious letters to the pope and Cosimo de Medici, urging that care be taken to have the Greeks treated with respect at Florence, *Epistolae*, vol. II., pp. 58-59, 62, 341-342. For a discussion of this whole phase of the situation see Voigt, *Die Wiederbelebung des Classischen Alterthums*, vol. II., pp. 116-118.

disputable scholarship and merit, such as Gaza or Lascaris, found it incredibly hard to make a respectable living, so stubborn was the prejudice against their race. The most devoted classical enthusiast of the day applied the word, *graeculus* or *semigraecus* to an enemy as one of the bitterest terms of opprobrium in his vocabulary. As relentlessly as ever in the Middle Ages he drew the distinction between the great men of the Hellenic past, whom he was bound to esteem, and their degenerate and schismatical descendants, a distinction obscured only for a season by the personal popularity of Chrysoloras.

Manuscripts of ancient Greek works were brought to Italy in considerable numbers during this same half-century before the downfall of Constantinople. The most noteworthy single importation was, of course, that made by the Sicilian Aurispa in 1423. He landed in Venice with two hundred and thirty-eight volumes of profane authors, a small library in itself, including as it did copies of almost every work that was to be recovered at all. The Medici subscribed money to pay off the debts Aurispa had accumulated on his stock and in course of time some of the finest manuscripts, among them the renowned Laurentian Codex, found the way into their libraries. The advent of Greek copyists made it possible also to reproduce Greek books upon Italian soil. Yet they remained comparatively rare and precious until Greek type was constructed for the printing press toward the end of the century. The humanist monk Traversari tells the story of a Greek book that was sent him from Venice by the hand of two brothers who were travelling to Florence. The young men, he says, attempted to cross the Po by boat but in the passage the skiff was overturned, the brothers were drowned and their goods sunk in the stream. His friends at Venice were distressed both at the loss of the Greek book and at the sad death of its bearers. Finally, however, they concluded to rescue what they could from the disaster and had the river-bed dragged. The book was found water-soaked and damaged. Traversari would not receive it, the associations with it being too unpleasant, and had it returned to Venice. Still he writes as if the disposition of it were a matter of moment both to himself and to every other scholar.⁶

Thus Italy became equipped with practically all the sources for Greek scholarship that we now possess, exclusive of the material recently uncovered by archaeologists. Here and there small groups of humanists prepared to avail themselves of these facilities with

⁶ Traversari, *Epistolae*, vol. II., p. 355.

great ardor and rejoicing. Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo abandoned the study of civil law. Pier Paolo Vergerio resigned a chair in the University of Padua, many another left his usual occupation, to devote himself to the acquisition of Greek.⁷ Old and young elbowed each other in Chrysoloras's lecture-room. As the first outburst of indiscriminate excitement died down, however, and the hardships of learning the new language without adequate text-book or dictionary began to be appreciated, the attendance naturally fell off, while even of those who persevered through years of application few could at any time with justice be called Greek scholars. Some fifteen or twenty possibly in the first half of the century acquired skill enough to read Greek with any pleasure or to translate with ordinary accuracy. The great majority, like Barbaro, the Venetian patrician, and many a man since his day, were able as students to read Greek with the aid of the teacher but preferred in after life to use a Latin translation.⁸

From the outset, indeed, it was recognized that to make Greek literature widely known, to bring it within reach of the average, cultivated reader, it must be translated into Latin. Chrysoloras had scarcely established himself in Florence before his abler students had begun to practice on translations. In time it was felt that one had hardly a claim to be ranked among the literary élite, if one had not translated at least one of Plutarch's *Lives* or an oration of Demosthenes. Poggio after an absence of some years in the North returned to Italy to find the fad for translating near its height. He did not rest until he had procured enough Greek to enable him to make two worthless but elaborate renderings of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and a part of the *History* of Diodorus Siculus. Having thereby brought himself up to current requirements he apparently rarely thought of his Greek again. Many another humanist who is mentioned as the author of this version or that was in reality no more than an amateur dabbler in the language and his translation nothing but a school exercise or a show-piece designed to attract the notice of a wealthy patron.

Nevertheless the defects in the translating of the time, so flagrant to a modern philologist, were to a large extent inevitable in the total lack of adequate grammars or lexicons. The elementary little catechism on the parts of speech drawn up by Chrysoloras and rewritten by Guarino, the only guide available for the first fifty years, could not carry one far.⁹ The larger works of Gaza and

⁷ Bruni, *Commentarius*, in Muratori, *Rer. Ital. Scriptt.*, vol. XIX., p. 920; Vergerio, *Epistolae*, pp. 81, 101-102.

⁸ Barbaro, *Epistolae* (ed. Quirino), vol. I., p. dxlvi.

⁹ A copy of Chrysoloras's grammar is in the library of Columbia University.

Lascaris needed supplementing by dictionaries. A native Greek was not always at hand to be consulted in case of perplexity and if within reach was himself often ignorant of usages in the classical period. Furthermore, the translator was commonly without the intellectual training to qualify him to comprehend abstrusities of thought or flights of imagination. Even a preparatory perusal of Cicero or Livy was not calculated to fit one to follow unerringly the reasoning of Aristotle or Thucydides. Above all, the humanist's conception of form and style was enough to prevent him from merging his own individuality loyally in that of the Greek original. For the Greek style was seldom Ciceronian. The Italian seems early to have found it disappointingly bare of ornament or rhetoric of the sort that he had learned in his Latin reading to admire most.

Certainly one discovers almost nowhere in humanistic literature any praise of it that seems at the same time warm, genuine and sincere. It was eulogized of course occasionally in dutiful, general phrases, somewhat as Hamlet is commended to-day in a schoolboy's essay on Shakespeare. Greek literature, we are told, is great because the Romans have always considered it so and because Cicero, Vergil, Horace, Seneca took pattern from it. "In fact every Roman", as Barbaro puts it, "who was born to distinction and fulfilled his destiny, was so accomplished and learned in Greek letters that not only did he know all that was contained in them, but even had whole lines and passages by heart. Thus the Caesars, the consulares, the triumphant generals, the praetors, senators, patricians, knights and others of the same class quoted impromptu from Homer or Sophocles and wrote elegantly in Greek." Are their descendants to fall behind them? But praise like this sounds like punctilious insistence on an obligation to admire and study Greek and almost convinces one that the writer himself took little natural pleasure in it. Greek literature and Greek style must be great because we are always told they are, they keep repeating. But it is labored admiration; one seldom finds a man writing out of a full heart as if he spontaneously and honestly enjoyed them.¹⁰ The word employed to characterize Greek method is *simplicitas* with its rather unfavorable connotation. The Italian translator

¹⁰ For Barbaro's long letter of the conventional, conscientious type on the excellence and importance of Greek literature, see his *Epistolae*, vol. II., pp. 179-190. It is but one illustration out of many that might be given. For one of the exceptional expressions of evidently heartfelt admiration, see Bruni's letter on Plato, *Epistolae*, vol. I., pp. 15-17. But Bruni also sometimes praises from a sense of duty, *ibid.*, pp. 137-138. Compare Voigt, *Wiederbelebung*, vol. II., pp. 160-162.

knew that his version would be judged by contemporaries who would never read the original and would applaud his work only as it succeeded in being itself elegant and ornate after the fashion of the Latin rhetoricians. Even fellow-humanists would not be apt to apply the test of fidelity to the Greek but, like Eneas Sylvius, would blame the translator if he presented them with an Aristotle who was not fluent or graceful.¹¹ A Greek book freely translated and embellished, with obscurities omitted and material rearranged to suit prevailing notions of taste and importance, was considered to have passed through a process of refinement and to have been improved by the genius of the Latins.¹²

The versions of Aristotle made in the thirteenth century were exact and literal to a degree, at a sacrifice of all idea of style. As a result they were now considered barbaric and worthless. "I could not endure", says Bruni, "that anyone should hurl a torch upon a painting by Giotto. How then do you suppose I feel when I see the books of Aristotle, more precious than any picture, marred in the flames of such a translation. Am I not distressed? Am I not indignant?"¹³ Aristotle must accordingly be totally retranslated in the style in which it might be imagined he would have written had he fortunately lived in the fifteenth century.

In view of facts like these one must admit that the part played by Greek literature in fifteenth-century Italy was less triumphant than it is ordinarily supposed to have been. The conception of the quality and purpose of the "studia humanitatis" and of the ideals suitable for a gentleman and a scholar had been well formulated after the models furnished by Cicero and the later Romans before the Greek Renaissance began. As in architecture the luxuriant Romano-Corinthian was preferred to the severer Doric, so in literature the inflated rhetoric of the late Republic and the Empire, the passionate periods of Cicero and the pompous sententiousness of Livy and Sallust, were more esteemed than the sobriety, lucidity and balance of the best periods of Greece. An acquaintance with Greek authors in the original or in translation enabled one of course to adorn an oration or a letter with imposing allusions to Themisto-

¹¹ Pius II., *Commentarii* (Rome, 1584), *Lib. X.*, p. 449.

¹² An illustration, which is readily accessible, of the inaccuracy of the translation of a comparatively simple passage by as clever a Greek scholar as Leonardo Bruni is the rendering of a part of the *Symposium*, quoted by Bruni in a letter to Cosimo de Medici, *Epistolae*, vol. VI., pp. 70-76. For one out of many instances of the tone of superiority assumed by Italian scholars when comparing the relative merits of the Greek and Latin tongues, see Lorenzo Valla, *De Linguae Latinae Elegantia* (Paris, 1532), p. 3.

¹³ Bruni, *Epistolae*, vol. I., p. 140.

cles, Pausanias or Alcibiades as well as to Manlius, Hortensius or Cato. It widened the range of one's quotations. But an ability to allude to events of Greek history or to quote from the pages of its literature does not imply that one is affected in the least by the Greek spirit or even comprehends in the least the Greek attitude of mind. The enthusiasm for antiquity, in so far as it was intelligent and unaffected and really influential, was for Roman antiquity rather than Hellenic.

How this might be true even where a Greek author was especially regarded as the source of inspiration and enlightenment is best shown perhaps by the Platonic revival. Plato's works were translated by more than one prominent scholar, academies were founded at Florence and Rome where his doctrines were studied by men inclined to independent thinking and philosophic speculation, extravagant devotion to his image and to his memory was professed by his disciples and a sort of hazy idealism permeating various departments of thought was ascribed to the widespread propagation of his theories. Yet the more one hears of this fifteenth-century Platonism, whether in its intenser forms at Florence or Rome or in its vaguer, more general manifestations in art and literature at large, the more one is assured that it is something that Plato himself would never have countenanced or acknowledged and that not even here can any genuinely Athenian spirit be said to be at work.

Plato was first made popular by the Greek teacher, Gemisthus Pletho, who spent a few years at Florence and invested his discourses with an air of mystery and esotericism most alluring to inquisitive and restless minds. Platonism was with Pletho a cult, explained and interpreted by Plotinus, in short, a form of Neo-Platonism. His more heterodox views he imparted cautiously and stealthily to a few chosen pupils but it seems clear that he hoped ultimately to base upon them a new and popular religion. "I heard him at Florence", says an acquaintance, "when he came to the council of the Greeks, declaring that within a few years one single religion would be accepted heartily and unanimously by the whole world. When I asked him whether that would be Christianity or Mohammedanism, he replied, 'Neither, but something very like paganism.'"¹⁴

Marsiglio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, the lights of the later Florentine academy, were loyal churchmen but they also coupled Plotinus with Plato and then, for lack of any logical method

¹⁴ Schultze, *Georgios Gemistos Plethon*, p. 77, note 3.

of reconciling both with the Scriptures, had recourse to a feeble and confused kind of allegory. Marsiglio Ficino, having finished his translation of the works of Plato, writes to an acquaintance, "In the next place, that eyes might not be dazzled by the sight of this new luminary, I have composed a sort of commentary in eighteen books, in which to the best of my ability I explain the Platonic mysteries, paying more regard to meaning than to exact wording. Thus I remove the poetic veil and show that everywhere the thoughts of Plato are in accord with the divine law. I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Providence has decreed that certain keen intellects, who pay reluctant obedience to the unsupported authority of divine law, will yield now that the reasoning of Plato is brought to the aid of religion."¹⁵ Ancient deities were explained sometimes as types of the angels, again as the souls of the heavens and the planets or as the soul of the world as it moves and generates. The story of creation in the book of Genesis was by main force interpreted to agree with the Neo-Platonic theory of the evolution of the universe. Anything became a symbol or emblem of any other thing and assumed any significance one chose to give it. No serious, consistent system of philosophy was constructed, as had been done by the schoolmen of the thirteenth century upon the foundation of Aristotle. The age did not call for sustained mental labor over abstract problems but was for the most part content to accept the somewhat flimsy and optimistic idealism which came into vogue and which verged usually either on the fantastic or on the mystical or sentimental. The basis for it all, as far as it had a basis in the past, was Roman and Alexandrian rather than Platonic.

Thus even in philosophy the influences from antiquity which helped to shape fifteenth-century thought were derived more directly from the Empire than from Hellas. A knowledge of the Greek tongue remained in the main an accomplishment for professional men of letters, elegant and to that degree desirable. Through the recommendations of Quintilian the study of Greek was introduced into two or three of the best Italian schools and the argument was brought forward that one could understand and appreciate the Latin tongue far better by the help of some knowledge of Greek.¹⁶ But there was no serious effort to determine the Greek point

¹⁵ Marsiglio Ficino, *Opera* (Basle, 1561), vol. I., p. 855. Compare Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, *passim*.

¹⁶ For an exceptionally advanced opinion on the value of Greek, see Battista Guarino, *De Ordine Docendi et Studendi*, in Woodward's *Vittorino da Feltre*, pp. 166-167.

of view, which was supposed as a matter of course to have been the same as the Roman, nor to utilize Greek literature save as a storehouse of pedantic quotations and ethical examples. The practical value of Greek in exposing errors of Scriptural interpretation and in waging theological controversy was realized only after the knowledge of it had been carried into northern Europe. Such writing as was produced in Italy, comparable at all in straightforward originality and acumen to the Greek, was prompted by the stress and stir of contemporary life and except in surface embellishments shows little effect of the Greek Renaissance.

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